

Freshwater Fisheries Monthly Report – February 2021

Stock Assessment

Northern Pike Survey Planning - Began planning for spring sampling efforts for Deep Creek Lake northern pike. All equipment and materials will be gathered and tested prior to March sampling. To meet social distancing requirements and adhere to new sampling protocols, surveys will be conducted using two boats. For safety purposes, a designated crew of three will be on the collection boat and a crew of two will be on the processing boat. Sampling should be more streamlined and take less time with the ability of the collection boat to offload their catch and immediately travel to the next sample location.

Trout Surveys - Participated in a virtual meeting with Trout Unlimited (TU) for future projects and planning. Staff discussed planning of sampling efforts for current projects as well as planning for future projects. Sampling efforts with TU will expand to the Jennings Run watershed as well as expanding within the Casselman River watershed.

Met with Trout Unlimited staff to discuss upcoming project proposals for both the Savage River and Casselman River watersheds in Garrett County.

Eastern region staff provided assistance with the annual winter trawl survey in the upper Chesapeake Bay.



Photos from aboard the R/V Chesapeake during the winter trawl survey. "Thinking warm thoughts."

Habitat and Water Quality

Environmental Review - Provided aquatic resource information for the following environmental review projects:

- An application submitted to construct a stone revetment along the shoreline of Deep Creek Lake. Comments were provided for proper timing and materials for the project along with the fish habitat enhancement structures that need to be added to the revetment.
- Three time-of-year waiver requests in Harford, Howard, and Montgomery counties. Comments were provided to Environmental Review staff.
- Trail improvements at Fair Hill Natural Resource Management Area (NRMA).

- Infrastructure improvements at Fair Hill NRMA.
- Two State Highway Administration (SHA) highway projects in Cecil County.
- Proposed Bay Trust Fund Grant projects.
- Proposed salmon aquaculture facility on Eastern Shore.

Jennings Randolph Lake Habitat Enhancement - The fish habitat enhancement project for Jennings Randolph Lake has been put on temporary hold. Staff were in the process of gathering and hauling materials to the deployment site and then winter set in and hasn't held back. Staff will continue to work on the project when weather permits.

Jabez Branch - Participated in a field visit to Jabez Branch watershed with Environmental Review, Anne Arundel County, and Maryland Department of Environment staff to review sediment and erosion control/stormwater management measures currently in place. Freshwater Fisheries also participated in a conference call with department staff, Maryland Department of Environment staff, and Trout Unlimited volunteers to discuss brook trout habitat concerns in the Jabez Branch watershed.

Acid Deposition - Participated in a virtual meeting with staff from Maryland Department of the Environment for planning of future sampling to monitor the effects of mitigation efforts in streams impacted by acid deposition. Background information was provided to prioritize new sampling locations where water quality and benthic macroinvertebrates will be sampled.

Stocking and Population Management

Trout - Assisted hatchery personnel with the stocking of rainbow/golden trout into statewide streams and lakes for preseason angling.

Approved a fish relocation in the Cabin John Creek watershed by Montgomery County Department of Environment in conjunction with a stream restoration project.

Regional staff submitted warmwater and coldwater fish requests to hatchery managers for 2021 fish stocking needs.

Stocking Permits - Three stocking permits were issued in February.

Outreach

Customer Service - Provided customer service information for inquiries regarding:

- Tips for fishing Deep Creek Lake
- Current conditions at Piney Reservoir
- Ice fishing regulations and conditions
- Using snowmobiles on Deep Creek Lake for transport during ice fishing. Directed caller to Deep Creek Lake Management for correct information.
- Fall stocking on the Casselman River
- Trout stocking questions
- Regulations and gear required to start fishing
- Fishing tournaments on Deep Creek Lake
- Firewood cutting on state lands. Referred caller to proper personnel.
- Constructing a small bridge over a tributary to the North Branch Potomac River. Directed caller to Allegany Soil Conservation District for information.
- Review and approval of five scientific collection permits

- Walleye fishing information for the nontidal Potomac River

State Lakes Protection and Restoration Fund - Provided information for local lakes as part of a cooperative effort to make brochures for the State Lakes Protection and Restoration Fund. Brochures are being developed to help the general public have a better grasp of how important these lakes are and the benefit of current projects. Information on lake characteristics, available habitat, fish populations, and special features were given for Deep Creek Lake, Herrington Lake, New Germany Lake, and Lake Habeeb.

Angler Access

Fishery Management Areas:

North Branch of Potomac River - Held a virtual meeting with Mt. Nebo Work Center and Engineering and Construction staff to discuss future projects for Mt. Nebo and field projects. The main topic concerning fisheries is the rehabilitation project to improve the public access areas at the McCoolle and Black Oak boat launches on the North Branch of Potomac River. This project will involve resurfacing all access roads and parking at each launch site. Work is scheduled to begin in fiscal year 2022.

North Branch Potomac River Creel Survey - Made final preparations for conducting a creel survey of anglers at access points on the North Branch Potomac River tailwater from Barnum to the Black Oak fishery management area. The survey will collect angler effort, catch, and harvest data as well as tackle preferences to characterize this popular trout fishery.

Rising Sun Pond - Met with an in-house engineer at Rising Sun Pond to discuss needed dam repairs. The original water control structure (1950s) has deteriorated and is in dire need of replacement. A large tree root recently penetrated the drain, which created a blockage. The blockage was cleared and staff are working to remove problem trees. More planning, discussions, and work to follow.

Wye Mills Lake Fishery Management Area – The lake has an antiquated millrace used to operate the historic Old Wye Mill. As part of an extensive dam inspection, the millrace pipes were visually inspected using a remote-controlled rover with special optics and recording devices. Results are pending.



Engineer controlling the rover inside a millrace pipe at Wye Mills.

Brunswick Fishery Management Area - Hired a contractor to clear a pipe to improve drainage and allow water to flow into the pond. The clogged pipe was impacting the fishery management area and the adjacent property.

Invasive Species

Blue Catfish Tracking - Although a windy month limited the number of days tracking could occur, biologists continued tracking a number of blue catfish tagged with acoustic and radio transmitters in the tidal, freshwater Patuxent River (Anne Arundel, Calvert, Charles, and Prince George's counties). The work is part of a collaborative project with the department, United States Geological Survey (USGS) Leetown Science Center (West Virginia), Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC), and other partners. Fish were only detected in the uppermost reaches of the study area during February, as in previous months.

Catfish Tournament - Freshwater Fisheries Program is supporting a catfish tournament on the Patuxent River benefitting Calvert County Hospice in March 2021. Along with providing information on invasive catfishes and the Patuxent River blue catfish tagging study, the tournament will also provide staff the opportunity to educate anglers on how to process their catch and problems invasive species cause to native populations. Anglers that do not want to keep their catch will have the opportunity to donate their fillets to local organizations that feed needy families in Southern Maryland.

Telemetry Data - Designed a Microsoft Access database for blue catfish telemetry data from the tidal Patuxent River (Anne Arundel, Calvert, Charles, Prince George's counties). The data are being collected as part of the cooperative project with ASMFC, USGS Leetown Science Center, and other partners. The dataset is quickly growing in size and complexity.

Signage - Sent signs depicting invasive species information (e.g., Water Chestnut, Clean Dry Drain) to interested state parks, counties, and neighboring agencies who had requested such information.

American Fisheries Society - Submitted an abstract to co-host a symposium at the 151st American Fisheries Society meeting (Baltimore) on the practical use of environmental DNA (eDNA) monitoring for invasive species by state agencies.

Brook Trout Program

Worked with regional operations to finalize an angler creel survey for the purpose of collecting fishery dependent data on the North Branch of the Potomac River tailwater fishery. The survey will begin in March and the data generated will help staff to best manage the popular trout fishery.

Began final preparations for an eDNA project funded by a State Wildlife Grant (SWG). The purpose of the project is to determine at what distance downstream, and at what density, brook trout eDNA can be collected using a streamlined sampling approach. Field work is scheduled for March.

Began analyzing flow and temperature data for the Savage River mainstem and tributary study that is funded by a State Wildlife Grant (SWG). This project is looking at which tributaries contribute the most cold water to the mainstem during low flow and thermally stressful periods. Results will help better protect the Upper Savage Watershed which is one of the largest connected brook trout watersheds south of New England.

Worked to develop public outreach to aid in the identification of Maryland's trout species. A high-quality sign is being produced in collaboration with the Native Fish Coalition to display in areas where brook trout harvest is not allowed, but other trout may be harvested by anglers. A pocket guide to trout identification is in the early stages of development.

Participated in the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission virtual open house. The purpose was to share management strategies and general information on a variety of fisheries present in Pennsylvania.

Tidal Bass Program

Completed Black Bass Annual Review (Volume 13) and a tournament director letter and summary report, which should all be sent to constituents in March.